

PRELIMINARY STAFF SUMMARY OF INFORMATION



Haskell-Barker-Atwater Buildings

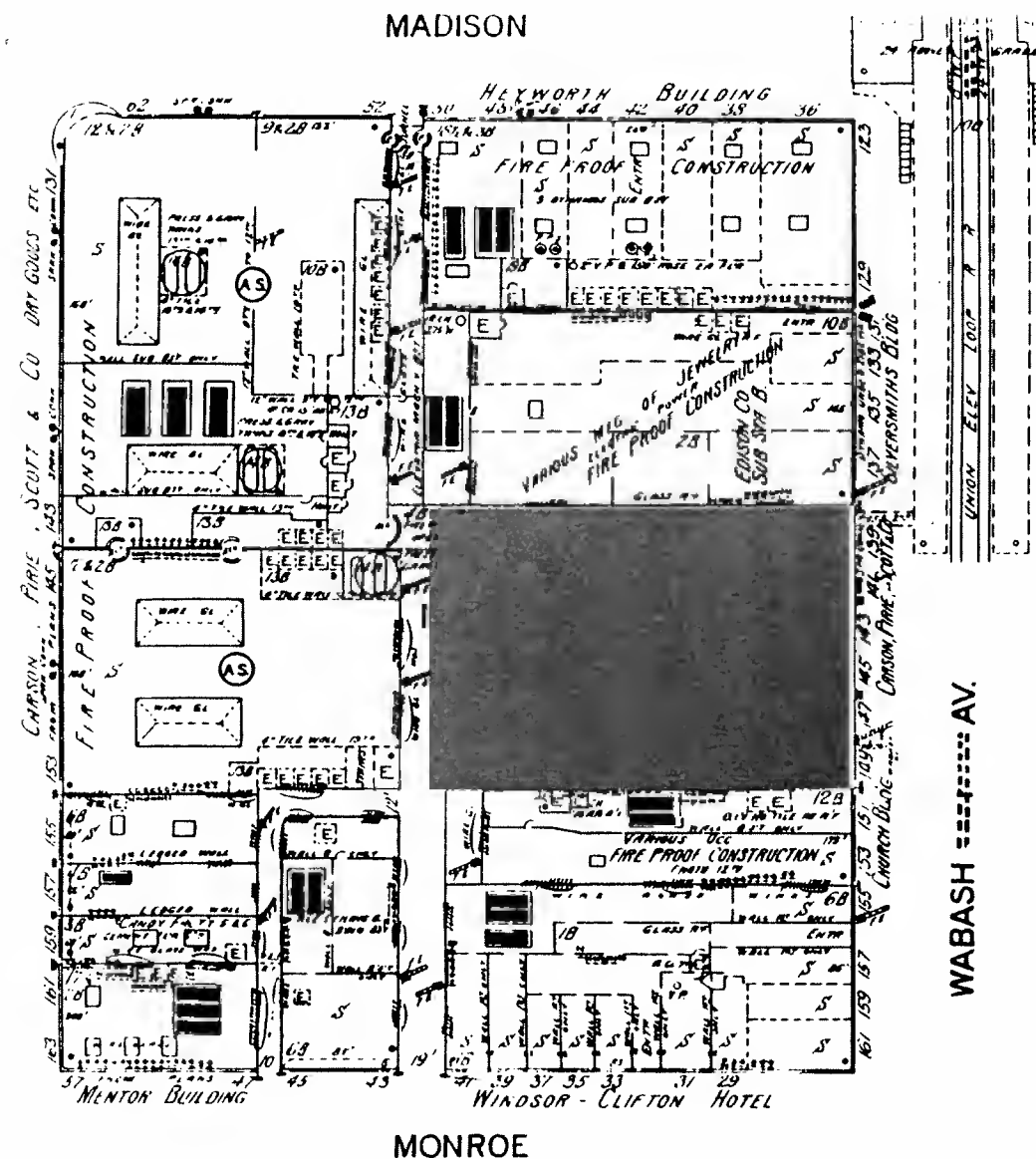
18-28 S. Wabash Avenue

Submitted to the Commission on Chicago Landmarks in April 1989
Recommended to the City Council on April 2, 1990



CITY OF CHICAGO
RICHARD M. DALEY, MAYOR

Department of Planning and Development
J.F. Boyle, Jr., Commissioner



ABOVE: A 1903 map of the block bounded by Madison, Monroe, State, and Wabash, showing the location of the Haskell-Barker-Atwater Buildings (shaded area). At the top left corner of the map is the Carson Pirie Scott department store; at top right is the Madison-Wabash "L" station.

COVER: The upper stories of the Haskell-Barker-Atwater Buildings are largely invisible to passersby, due to the presence of the "L" structure on Wabash Avenue. However, the buildings' Victorian-era stone details remain prominent features for passengers on "L" trains.

Haskell-Barker-Atwater Buildings 18-28 S. Wabash Ave.

Dates and Architects:

Haskell Building, 18-20 S. Wabash

1875; Wheelock & Thomas

1896; Louis Sullivan

(remodeling of first and second floors)

Barker Building, 22-24 S. Wabash

1875; Wheelock & Thomas

Atwater Building, 26-28 S. Wabash

1877; John Mills Van Osdel

Few cities retain less of their Victorian-era commercial architecture than Chicago, where these buildings are often overlooked in favor of the highrise commercial architecture of the next generation.

In 1975, a survey by the Commission on Chicago Landmarks found that 75 of these 1870s-era commercial structures still remained in Chicago's Loop. However, by the time of another Commission study 15 years later, only 30 of those buildings still survived.

The Haskell-Barker-Atwater Buildings are one of the best remaining examples of this period of architecture. As such, they provide a rare indication of what the east side of the Loop looked like following its reconstruction after the Great Fire of 1871—but before the skyscraper boom of the 1890s.

All three buildings were designed by prominent post-Fire architects, including the city's first architect, John Mills Van Osdel. The upper floors of the buildings typify this period of architecture, with highly decorative masonry and distinctive round-arched window openings.



Dwarfed in scale by its neighbors along the Wabash Avenue "L" tracks, this row of 1870s buildings (center) is one of the few reminders of what the east side of the Loop looked like following the Great Chicago Fire.

In addition, the bottom two floors of one of the buildings (Haskell) are particularly notable as the work of master architect Louis Sullivan, who was commissioned to modernize the building in 1896. The contrast between the traditional masonry construction of the building's upper stories and the steel-framed skeleton construction of these lower floors provides a unique insight into the evolution of late-19th century architecture.

Haskell and Barker buildings, 18-20 and 22-24 S. Wabash

Two of the buildings, the Haskell and the Barker, are identical four-story structures constructed by two different owners, but they share a common facade. They were erected in 1875 by Frederick Haskell and John Barker, who were partners in the railroad car manufacturing firm of Haskell & Barker.

The northern half of the building (18-20 S. Wabash) was owned by Haskell; the southern half (22-24 S.) by Barker. The buildings were apparently erected as speculative "mercantile loft buildings," and were intended for lease to other businesses. There is no record of the firm of Haskell & Barker occupying either structure. (Later occupants of the Barker Building included the Spiegel clothing company and Buck & Rayner, one of the largest Loop druggists at the turn of the century.)

Both buildings were designed by architects Otis Wheelock (1816-86) and Cyrus P. Thomas, two prominent, early Chicago architects. Wheelock initially came to Chicago in 1839, spending a brief period here before returning to New York City, where he trained in the office of Minard LaFever, whose architectural "pattern books" had a great amount of influence on 19th-century designs. After Wheelock returned to Chicago, he became associated with W.W. Boyington, the architect of the Chicago Water Tower, on a number of pre-Fire commercial buildings.

Between 1872 and 1874, Wheelock formed a partnership with Cyrus P. Thomas that contributed substantially to the post-Fire rebuilding effort. One of the firm's few other surviving structures is the Delaware Building, 36 W. Randolph, a designated Chicago Landmark (see drawing, page 9). Little is known about Thomas, other than the fact that he and

his father, William, were responsible for a number of pre-Fire residential designs.

The original facades of the Haskell and Barker buildings are representative of the high-style designs used for 1870s mercantile loft buildings along such high-visibility streets as Wabash Avenue. The upper stories are divided into five horizontal bays, by a series of classically detailed stone "pilasters." These masonry piers, which represent the load-bearing structure of the building, are capped by ornamented capitals and detailed with fluted columns.

Also of interest are the intricately detailed window hoods between the second and third floors. An ornamental sheet-metal cornice, capped by triangular-shaped pediments, originally topped each building (see photo, page 7). The pediments were removed, and the cornice simplified, after 1905.

However, what makes these two buildings particularly significant—in terms of the development of Chicago's post-Fire architecture—is how well they illustrate the distinctions between traditional



The facades of the Haskell (foreground) and Barker buildings are identical, except for a later remodeling of the Haskell's first two floors by architect Louis Sullivan.

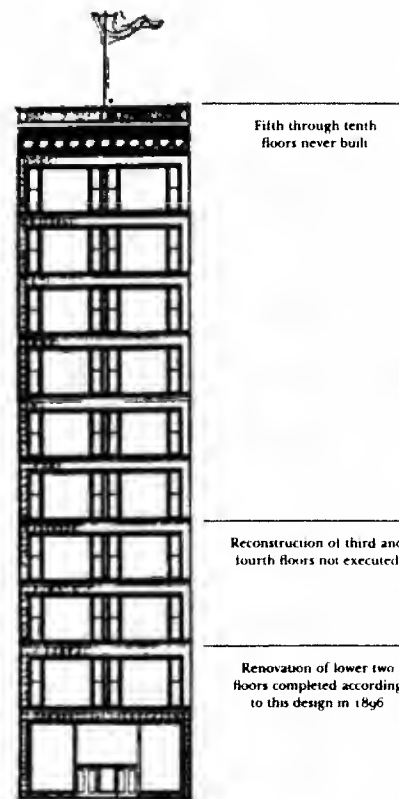


The two-story-tall "pilasters" on the Haskell and Barker Buildings are rare examples of classical-style detailing on an 1870s Loop commercial building.

masonry design (e.g., the upper stories) and steel-frame skeleton construction (e.g., the subsequent remodeling of the first and second floors of the Haskell Building).

In 1896, in anticipation of the completion of the Loop elevated rail line on Wabash Avenue, the Schlesinger & Mayer department store acquired the Haskell and Barker buildings. The company's main department store stood on the western half of the same block, at the corner of State and Madison, but the store's owners saw an opportunity to develop a second entrance along Wabash, one that would provide a direct connection for "L" patrons.

The company commissioned architect Louis H. Sullivan, who had recently left the firm of Adler & Sullivan (the architects of the Auditorium Building), to design the building modernization. Sullivan's original plans called for an entirely new building front that would result in five additional stories, while creating expansive plate glass windows hung from a new ornamental iron-frame structure.



In 1896, a proposed remodeling of the Haskell Building by architect Louis Sullivan called for a complete refacing of the 1875-era structure (left), but the work only was carried out on the first two floors. Consequently, the design of the current facade (right) provides an excellent contrast between two differing styles of architecture, just 20 years apart.



A Louis Sullivan-designed, enclosed walkway (left photo) formerly provided a direct connection between the Haskell Building and the Madison-Wabash "L" station. It was removed in 1975. Right: A detail of the building's distinctive Sullivanesque ornament.

However, the only portion of Sullivan's design actually executed was the remodeling of the first two floors of the Haskell building. Steel beams were inserted above the first and second floors, which transferred the load of the masonry walls above to the side walls. This allowed the facade of the first two floors to be opened up considerably, with the larger windows of the two-bay arrangement replacing the original five-bay design.

The new design was favorably received, as noted in a February 27, 1897 article in the *Economist*, a Chicago real estate newspaper:

The value of apparent massiveness, the richness of plate glass and white paint are unquestionably emphasized in this front, and few people pass without noticing it as it is in wide contrast with anything in the immediate vicinity.

Contributing to the drama of the design was a distinctive enclosed walkway, also designed by Sullivan, that connected the "L" station platform directly to the second-level of the Haskell building. The cast-iron structure--which store advertisements of the period called the Crystal Bridge--was lavishly ornamented, with a glass-and-iron roof and broad



The facade of the Atwater Building includes a wealth of stone arches, carved capitals, keystones, and other details characteristic of Victorian-style eclecticism.

side windows. Light bulbs dotted the exterior, and the store's name was prominently cast into the Sullivanesque ornamentation. (The bridge, which was later remodeled, was removed by the Chicago Transit Authority in 1975.)

The larger-scale remodeling of the Haskell Building was never undertaken, as the company redirected its expansion program to a mammoth reconstruction of their State Street building. The result is the internationally famous Carson Pirie Scott & Company Building (1 S. State St.), which was designed by Sullivan and completed in 1904. Its distinctive large windows and gridlike facade owe a large part of their character to Sullivan's earlier design for the Haskell Building.

The first floor of both buildings were refaced in c.1920 with a plain cast iron storefront, although the original Sullivan ornament possibly survives underneath. The second-floor ornament is intact. A deteriorating stone ledge between the third and fourth floors was largely removed in early 1996.

Atwater Building, 26-28 S. Wabash Ave.

Directly south of the Haskell and Barker buildings is the five-story Atwater Building, which was erected in 1877 for John P. Atwater, an out-of-town investor.

For many years, the building housed A. G. Spalding & Bros., a sporting goods company founded by baseball Hall-of-Famer Albert Spalding, a former player, manager, and owner of the Chicago White Stockings, which later became known as the Cubs. (For a time, during the store's occupancy, a distinctive three-story-tall rifle adomed the front facade of the Atwater Building.)

The building was designed by John Mills Van Osdel (1811-91), the city's first architect. Trained as a builder and contractor, Van Osdel came to Chicago in 1837—shortly after its incorporation as a city—to oversee the construction of a residence for William B. Ogden, one of the city's most prosperous citizens and its first mayor. It was not until 1844, however, that Van Osdel established the city's first architectural practice. His business prospered from Chicago's booming

growth, as he designed a wide range of private residential, commercial, and public buildings.

Following the Fire of 1871, Van Osdel received an enormous number of commissions—nearly 100 in just 18 months. They included the Tremont House, 31 W. Lake St. (built 1873; demolished 1937); the McCarthy Building, 32 W. Washington St. (built 1872; demolished 1990); and the Page Brothers Building, 177-91 N. State St. (built 1872; see drawing on page 9).

The design of the Atwater Building is representative of many commercial buildings of the period. It is five bays wide, with a central three-bay section flanked by single-window bays. Stylistically, the building combines Victorian Gothic elements (e.g., its arched pediment and the mix of brick and stone materials) with Italianate-style detailing (e.g., round-arched windows and ornamental capitals and keystones). Built relatively late in the post-Fire era, the Atwater Building was one of the last commercial blocks to employ this type of Victorian eclectism.

The building's decorative masonry pediment (see photo) was removed sometime after 1905. The storefront also has been remodeled, and the building has been painted gray, which obscures the original contrast between the buff-colored sandstone and dark brick. A deteriorated stone inscription of the building name ("J.P. Atwater"), which was located below the cornice line, was removed in early 1996. Otherwise, the building remains intact.

Post-Fire Architecture in the Loop

In the years following the Fire, Chicago residents looked on with pride as the downtown's streetscape was rapidly rebuilt with imposing four- to six-story buildings. Unlike other American cities of the period, which included a mix of old and new structures, the total devastation—and rapid reconstruction—of Chicago's Loop resulted in a cohesive development of considerable grandeur. The result of this rebuilding effort was proudly referred to by the local press as the "New City."

However, little did anyone suspect that these same buildings, within 20 years, would be viewed

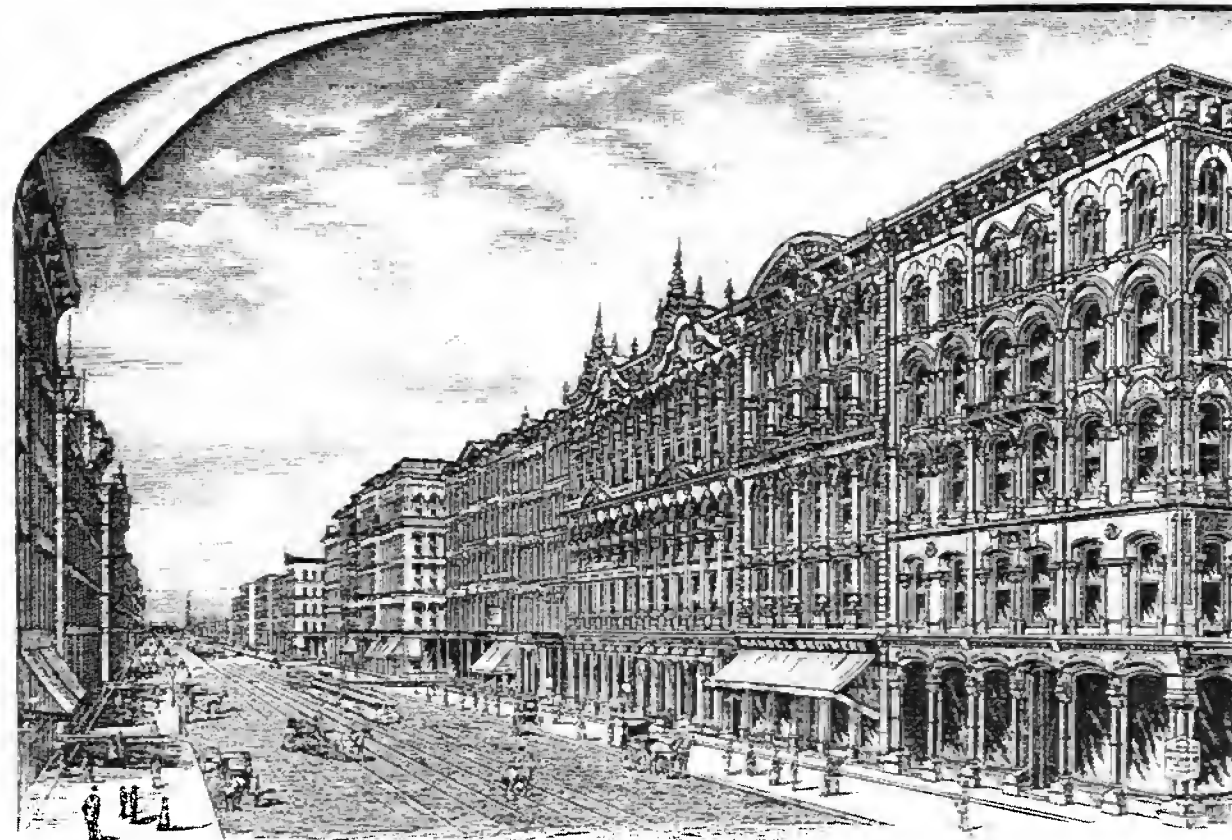


At the time of this 1905 photograph, the A.G. Spalding & Bros. sporting goods store occupied the Atwater Building (left), which still sported its original decorative cornice and pediment.

as obsolete and outmoded, the victims of new technologies, changing aesthetic tastes, and a rapidly expanding economic prosperity. Never in the history of Chicago architecture has any group of buildings undergone such a dramatic and rapid transition, from pride to derision, as did these imposing structures of the post-Fire era.

Furthermore, because their heyday was so brief, little attention has been given to their architectural significance, even though these post-Fire commercial buildings represent an important part of the city's architectural heritage and are significant precursors of its later architectural achievements.

Commercial buildings of the 1870s were of load-bearing construction: masonry exterior walls, interior wood or cast-iron columns, and wood floors and joists. Street elevations were of stone, brick, or



This c.1885 drawing of State Street, looking north from Madison Street, shows what the city's commercial architecture looked like following the Fire of 1871, but before the advent of the skyscraper. The buildings in the foreground, which housed the Mandel Brothers Store (later Wieboldt's), were demolished in 1912.

cast iron, with a major division between the ground floor and upper stories.

The appearance of these buildings was as much the result of economic factors as aesthetic decisions. Their designs generally corresponded to the character of the streets on which they were located. The most elaborately executed buildings were those of the major hotels and retail stores, their ornate designs corresponding to their prominence and prestige. (None of these structures survive.)

Major mercantile businesses constructed commercial loft buildings that were smaller in scale, but only slightly less gradiose in design, than the hotels and department stores. These "mercantile lofts," such as the Haskell-Barker-Atwater Buildings and the Page Brothers Building (177-191 N. State; built 1872), were typically four- to six-stories tall and had approximately 50-60 feet of street frontage. Their interiors were left undivided, in order to facilitate their use for offices, warehousing, light manufacturing, or other commercial activities.

As with the larger hotels and department stores of the 1870s, the architectural quality of these mercantile lofts was directly related to the property's economic value. Prestigious businesses who sought to locate along high-grade streets, such as Wabash Avenue, recognized the inherent promotional value of the building they would occupy. Consequently, they sought structures that were finely detailed, and many of the merchants featured drawings of the buildings on their stationery and in newspaper advertising.

The other building categories from this period included: premier office buildings, such as the Delaware Building (36 W. Randolph, 1872-74) and the Washington Block (40 N. Wells, 1873-74); second-class office buildings, such as the Stone and Palmer buildings (15 and 25 W. Adams, 1872), and second-class mercantile lofts, such as the Lake and Franklin Group (corner of Lake and Franklin streets).

It is difficult, today, to image the character of these building streetscapes, or to understand the level of achievement represented by the rebuilding of an entire downtown. An 1881 book by English novelist Lady Duffus Hardy presents one account:

The business streets are lined with handsome massive houses, some six or seven stories high, substantially built, sometimes of red brick with stone copings and elaborate carvings, while others are built of that creamy stone which reminds one of the Paris boulevards....On either



Two of the few surviving examples of post-Fire commercial buildings in the Loop: the Page Brothers Building (above) and the Delaware Building. Both are designated Chicago Landmarks.



side (of the street) are large handsome drygoods, millinery, and other stores of all possible descriptions....The different banks, churches, and municipal buildings which had been destroyed by the great fire-fiend are all re-erected in a substantial style, though with varying degrees of eccentric architecture.

Due to its proximity to Lake Michigan, the I&M Canal, and numerous rail lines, Chicago grew faster than most other American cities. Between 1877 and 1883, the population grew from 420,000 to nearly 600,000; by 1895, it had grown to more than one million.

Its central business district of five- and six-story buildings had been adequate for the business needs of a city of 500,000 residents, but as the city grew the limitations on continued Loop expansion became apparent. Development to the west, north, and east was barred by the lake and river, while the tangle of railroad tracks forestalled development to the south. Consequently, vertical development became the only means of maintaining the commercial viability of the central area.

The development of of "skeleton frame construction" literally allowed buildings to reach new heights without sacrificing valuable rental space. The 10-story Home Insurance Buildings, which was constructed in 1885 at the northeast corner of LaSalle and Adams streets (demolished, 1931) was the first structure to apply this new framing technique to high-rise commercial architecture. Equally significant was the development of sophisticated passenger elevators, innovations in building foundations, and the evolution of terra cotta as both an exterior building cladding and for interior fireproofing.

By the 1890s, the post-fire structures were already being regarded in nostalgic terms. *The Standard Guide to Chicago* (1891) noted the passing of these structures:

The Bryan block (northwest corner of Monroe and LaSalle streets) is another of the back-number great buildings of the city. I very well remember that 15 years ago it was pointed out with pride; no it isn't pointed out at all....(but) its central location makes it one of the most valuable pieces of property in the city. [The Bryan Block was demolished in 1904 for the construction of the Northern Trust Bank Building.]

APPENDIX

Criteria for Designation

The following criteria, as set forth in Section 2-120-620 of the Municipal Code of Chicago, were considered by the Commission on Chicago Landmarks in determining whether the Haskell-Barker-Atwater Buildings should be recommended for landmark designation.

CRITERION 1

Its value as an example of the architectural, cultural, economic, historic, social, or other aspect of the heritage of the City of Chicago, State of Illinois, or the U.S.

The Haskell-Barker-Atwater Buildings are historically significant for their association with the Chicago Fire of 1871. They are the first structures built on their sites after the Fire and, as such, epitomize the renewal efforts following one of the worst catastrophes to occur during the 19th century in the U.S.

New construction along South Wabash at this time reflected the changing character of the street and the Loop as a whole, transforming one of the oldest parts of the city from a mixed-use area to an urbanized city center. These buildings are exemplary of that process of urbanization that occurred in the decade following the Fire. While other buildings of this vintage may exist throughout the city, few—if any—of these were built on the rubble of the structures destroyed in the Fire.

Furthermore, these buildings and other 1870s commercial structures in the Loop had an impact on an even broader national context, according to architectural historian Richard Longstreth:

Just as with New York, Chicago's mid-century architecture to a large degree set the standard for development in smaller cities and in towns. The universality of the language of mid-century commercial architecture to a significant degree stems from the widespread desire to emulate work done in the largest of cities, which for many Americans was virtually synonymous with Chicago.

CRITERION 3

Its identification with a person or persons who significantly contributed to the architectural, cultural, economic, historic, social, or other aspect of the development of the City of Chicago, State of Illinois, or the United States.

In the years following the Great Fire, the city looked on with pride as the downtown streetscape was rapidly rebuilt with imposing four- to six-story buildings that represented the rebirth of an devastated city. The Haskell-Barker-Atwater Buildings are, through their developers and architects, identified with a collection of persons who significantly contributed to the redevelopment of the City of Chicago.

Two of the three buildings were erected by Frederick Haskell and John Barker, partners in the railroad car manufacturing firm of Haskell & Barker. Built in 1875, they apparently were investment properties available for lease to other businesses. The Atwater

Building, immediately to the south, was built two years later in an eclectic Victorian style that distinguishes it from its neighbors.

CRITERION 4

Its exemplification of an architectural type or style distinguished by innovation, rarity, uniqueness, or overall quality of design, detail, materials, or craftsmanship.

The Haskell-Barker-Atwater Buildings were among the most distinctive commercial buildings erected during the period of the Loop's reconstruction following the Fire of 1871, and they remain as survivors of a significant building type that has all but disappeared from the central business district. Their significance lies not only in their rarity but in the design of their facades, stylistic articulation of their details, and high quality of craftsmanship demonstrated throughout.

The classically-inspired design motifs of the Haskell and Barker buildings were an architectural affirmation of the high-style aspirations intended by merchants along this stretch of Wabash Avenue. "It is a remarkable specimen of a classical approach to a commercial facade," says architectural historian Gerald Larson. The stylistic language used on the Atwater Building—a combination of Italianate and Victorian Gothic styles—also was associated with the finest to be seen in Chicago or any other American city of the day, thereby reflecting the quality of the goods available from the retailer within. "One is struck by (the) use of ornament," said Larson. "It's a rarity to find that type of ornament in any of Chicago's buildings that still exist."

The Haskell Building's facade also illustrates two distinctly different methods of construction. The narrowness of the window bays in the upper two floors (1875) reflects traditional masonry-bearing and semi-mill construction, while the large-plate display windows of the lower two floors (1896) exhibits the new technology of steel-and-iron framing that helped revolutionize American architecture.

CRITERION 5

Its identification as the work of an architect, designer, engineer, or builder whose individual work is significant in the history or development of the City of Chicago, the State of Illinois, or the United States.

The Haskell and Barker buildings were designed by architects Otis Wheelock and Cyrus P. Thomas, two prominent early Chicago architects whose work was substantial to the city's post-Fire rebuilding effort. In addition, the Haskell Building is distinguished for the remodeling of its lower two floors in 1896 by Louis H. Sullivan, a leading architect of the Chicago School and a preeminent figure in American architecture. Its large windows and minimal wall area are precursors to Sullivan's later design for the internationally famous Carson Pirie Scott and Company Building at State and Madison streets.

The Atwater Building was designed in 1877 by John Mills Van Osdel, who established the city's first architectural office in 1844. Van Osdel's practice prospered with the city's booming growth and, following the Fire of 1871, he designed—within an 18-month period—an enormous number of buildings that were said to comprise "one and a half miles of street frontage." The Atwater Building is one of the few surviving Van Osdel-designed buildings in the Loop.

Significant Features

Whenever a building, site, or district is under consideration for landmark designation, the Commission on Chicago Landmarks identifies the "significant features" of the property, in order for owners and the public to understand which elements are most important to the significance of the landmark.

Based on its evaluation of the Haskell-Barker-Atwater Buildings, the staff recommends that the significant features of this proposed landmark are:

- the Wabash Avenue exterior elevations and rooflines.

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Additional research material used in the preparation of this report is on file at the office of the Chicago Department of Planning and Development's Landmarks Division.

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From *Carson Pirie Scott*, 1988 (p. 4)
From *History of Chicago*, 1886 (p. 8)
From *Chicago at the Turn of the Century in Photographs*, 1984 (p. 9)
From *Rand McNally's Pictorial Chicago*, 1893 (p. 9, bot.)

This report was produced in July 1996. It is based on an earlier research report by the Commission on Chicago Landmarks, entitled *1870s Commercial Buildings in the Loop*.



The Wabash Avenue "L" structure plays a significant role in how one views the Haskell-Barker-Atwater Buildings. Above: a 1974 photograph, taken from the "L" station platform in front of the buildings. Below: a street-level view from 1990, looking west across Wabash.



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The Commission on Chicago Landmarks, whose nine members are appointed by the Mayor, was established in 1968 by city ordinance. It is responsible for recommending to the City Council that individual buildings, sites, objects, or entire districts be designated as Chicago Landmarks, which protects them by law. The Commission is staffed by the Chicago Department of Planning and Development, whose offices are located at 320 N. Clark St., Room 516, Chicago, IL 60610; Ph: 312-744-3200; TDD Ph: 744-2958.
